

FAQs about the ATAR

What is the ATAR?

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a number between 0.00 and 99.95 with increments of 0.05. It is a rank that provides a measure of your overall academic achievement in the NSW HSC in relation to that of other students, and it helps universities rank applicants for selection. It is calculated by the universities and released by UAC. **The ATAR is a rank, not a mark.**

Your ATAR indicates your position relative to the students who entered Year 7 with you. An ATAR of 80.00 indicates that you have performed well enough in the HSC to place you 20 percent from the top of your Year 7 group, assuming that all students in this group completed Year 12 and were eligible for the ATAR.

It is important to note that your ranking depends solely on your performance in the HSC.

What is the ATAR used for?

The ATAR is used by universities (either on its own or in conjunction with other selection criteria) to rank applicants, because for the majority of courses there are more applicants than there are places available.

The ATAR should not be used for any other reason because its sole function is to help universities select students for admission.

Who receives an ATAR?

ATARs are calculated for all ATAR-eligible students, but not all students are notified. Only NSW HSC students who indicate on their HSC entry forms that they wish to be notified of their ATAR will receive an ATAR Advice Notice from UAC. This will arrive in the mail at about the same time they receive their HSC results from the Board of Studies.

Am I eligible for an ATAR?

To be eligible for an ATAR you must satisfactorily complete at least 10 units of ATAR courses. These ATAR courses must include at least:

- eight units from Category A courses
- two units of English
- three ATAR courses of two units or greater
- four subjects.

How is my ATAR calculated?

Your ATAR is based on an aggregate of **scaled** marks in 10 units of ATAR courses comprising:

- your best two units of English and
- your best eight units from the remaining units. No more than two units of Category B courses can be included.

The actual calculation of your ATAR is a complex process that begins with scaling your raw HSC marks and ends with ranking you among your entire Year 7 cohort.

When is my ATAR calculated?

You will receive an ATAR the first year you satisfy the eligibility requirements. If you complete additional courses or repeat courses you have completed, your ATAR will be recalculated. Your most recent ATAR is the one used for selection purposes.

What is scaling?

Because scaled marks (not HSC marks) are used in the ATAR calculation, scaling is the first step in calculating the ATAR. It is necessary because HSC students take all kinds of different courses, and scaling allows courses to be compared fairly. We know that the same marks in different courses are not necessarily equal, just as the same amounts of money in different countries are not equal. In the same way that an exchange rate can be used to compare currency in different countries, scaling can be used to compare marks in different courses.

Can I find out what my scaled marks are?

No. Scaled marks are not reported to students. They are determined during an interim phase in the calculation of the ATAR.

Can I work out what my ATAR will be from my HSC marks?

No. Remember that your scaled marks (not your HSC marks) are used to calculate your ATAR, and your ATAR is not an average mark, it is a rank that indicates your position.

However, as a general rule, if you are in the middle group of students enrolled in your courses (with marks in the 70s) you are likely to get an ATAR in the late-60s. But sometimes marks in the 70s can mean a much lower ATAR depending on your courses and your position in your courses.

Which courses count towards my ATAR?

Only ATAR courses can be used in the calculation of your ATAR. Your ATAR is therefore calculated from your aggregate of scaled marks from your ATAR courses, including two units of English and your best eight units from the remaining courses (according to the ATAR rules).

Your ATAR Advice Notice tells you which of your courses were actually included in the calculation of your ATAR. Just by looking at your HSC marks, it is not possible to tell which courses will be included in your ATAR. Sometimes the course with the lowest HSC mark will not count, **but this is not always the case.**

Why is my ATAR low in comparison to my HSC marks?

Your ATAR is not a mark but a number that indicates your position in relation to other students.

Most HSC marks lie between 50 and 100 so that the middle students in most courses will receive a mark between 70 and 80. The middle Year 12 students will be likely to receive an ATAR of approximately 70.

Consider the following two students who completed the same courses. Fred received an HSC mark of 70 in each course, while Laura received an HSC mark of 80 in each course.

	Units	Fred		Laura	
		HSC mark/ 100	Percentile	HSC mark/ 100	Percentile
Biology	2	70	38	80	71
Business Studies	2	70	42	80	71
English (Advanced)	2	70	13	80	55
Mathematics	2	70	30	80	58
Modern History	2	70	25	80	62
Visual Arts	2	70	10	80	44
ATAR		59.05		82.25	

Their HSC marks in each course differ by only 10, yet their ATARs differ by 23.2. Laura’s ATAR is similar to her HSC marks while Fred’s ATAR is much lower than his HSC marks. This is because Laura’s percentiles (her positions) in her courses are much better than Fred’s.

Why is one course counted towards my ATAR when another course where I received a higher HSC mark does not count?

This is because your scaled marks are the marks included in your ATAR calculation and a higher HSC mark does not always mean a higher scaled mark. Your scaled mark in a course will be influenced by the overall scaled mean for that course.

The example below shows a student’s set of HSC marks.

Course	Scaled mean	P ₉₀	
		HSC mark	Scaled mark
Business Studies	47.6	88	75.4
English (Standard)	35.8	77	57.8
Information Processes and Technology	43.6	88	71.8
Modern History	54.4	89	79.4
Visual Arts	46.0	91	76.0

Although these marks are different, each is the 90th percentile of the course (P₉₀). Since the student’s position is the same for each course the scaled mark will depend on the academic quality of the candidature of the course concerned. The highest scaled mark is for Modern History, which has the highest scaled mean.

If I get the same HSC mark in two different courses, will the one with the higher scaled mean count towards my ATAR?

Not necessarily. It’s important to remember that the scaled mean indicates the average academic achievement of the students in that course. When you look at your results, you also have to consider **your** position in the course. A higher position in a course with a lower scaled mean may be enough to warrant its inclusion in your ATAR calculation.

Both your position in the course **and** the scaled mean are important in determining which of your courses contribute towards your ATAR.

The example below shows a student’s marks in two courses.

Course	Scaled mean	HSC mark	Percentile	Scaled mark
Physics	60.8	94	P ₉₉	92.8
French Continuers	68.6	94	P ₉₀	88.8

Physics and French Continuers have the same HSC mark of 94. French has a higher scaled mean than Physics but the scaled mark for Physics is higher. This is because the Physics mark represents a higher position than the French Continuers mark.

I have similar HSC marks to my friend, but we don’t have similar ATARs. Why not?

Your ATARs will only be similar if your courses are the same. If your courses are different and your courses have different scaled means, your ATARs may be very different.

Can I include Distinction courses?

Yes, Distinction courses are accredited as two-unit courses and are scaled in the same way as other courses.

Can I accumulate my courses?

Yes, you can accumulate courses over a period of up to five years.

Can I repeat my courses?

Yes, you can repeat courses over a period of up to five years. If you repeat a course, only the mark from your latest satisfactory attempt will be included in the calculation of your ATAR.

Are certain courses always ‘scaled up’ or ‘scaled down’?

No. Scaling is carried out afresh each year. If the quality of the candidature changes, the scaled mean will also change.

Can I choose certain courses to increase my ATAR?

No. As noted above, scaling is carried out afresh each year, so the scaled means are different every year. It is a myth that choosing certain courses will increase your ATAR. When you choose your courses you should think only about what you are interested in (usually what you are good at too) and what you need to do to prepare you for your course or career plans. The scaling process is designed to allow you to choose according to these principles and not, as far as university selection is concerned, be disadvantaged by your choice.

Is it true that if I study certain courses I can’t get a high ATAR?

No, there are students in every course who achieve high ATARs.

Can I have my ATAR recalculated?

Generally speaking no, but there are some instances where your ATAR will be recalculated:

- if the Board of Studies provides amended HSC results
- if you complete additional courses
- if you repeat courses you have already completed.

Will I be notified if my ATAR is recalculated?

Yes. Your ATAR will be recalculated if you complete additional courses or repeat courses you have completed, and you will receive a new ATAR Advice Notice.

Does the school I attend matter?

No. The school attended does not feature in the ATAR calculation. The ATAR calculation is based only on marks provided by the Board; no other information is used.

Does my postcode matter?

No.

In some courses more students are in performance band 6 than in other courses. Does this affect the scaled mark for the course?

No. It is the raw HSC marks that are scaled, not the HSC marks that you receive. The percentage of students placed in performance band 6 differs across courses, but this has no effect on the calculation of the ATAR.

In some courses more students get high HSC marks than in other courses. Does this affect the ATAR calculation?

No. Raw HSC marks are scaled and used in the ATAR calculation.

Do I get a better ATAR if I study more units?

This is a common question. While the data show that students who study more units tend to gain higher ATARs, that is not necessarily the reason why. The relationship between number of units studied and ATAR might result from personal attributes including interest, motivation, effort and time management. You cannot assume that simply by studying more units your ATAR will be increased.

Can an extension course contribute to the ATAR if the corresponding 2-unit course has not been satisfactorily completed?

The general answer is no. The exception is Mathematics where you can complete Extension 1 and Extension 2 without completing 2-unit Mathematics. You cannot complete Extension 2 without completing Extension 1.

English is different. To complete Extension 2 you must complete English (Advanced) as well as Extension 1.

Does an extension course have to be completed at the same time as the corresponding 2-unit course?

No. If you wish, you can complete the 2-unit course one year and the extension course in a later year. If you are adding an extension course and withdraw, the marks from the 2-unit course that you have already done will be available for inclusion in the calculation of your ATAR.

What happens if I already have an ATAR and add a new ATAR course the following year?

Your aggregate will be re-calculated using your new course and your previous courses. It may increase or stay the same but it will not go down. Since you are being compared with a different cohort your ATAR may increase, remain the same or decrease.

Which ATAR is used for selection purposes?

Your latest ATAR will be used for selection purposes. This could be better or worse than a previous ATAR.

How are extension courses scaled?

For most extension courses the scaled means and standard deviations are determined by the performance of the extension students on the corresponding 2-unit course.

How is English scaled?

English (Standard) and English (Advanced) are scaled as a single group.

If English (Advanced) and English (Standard) are scaled as a single group, why does the same HSC mark give different scaled marks in English (Standard) and (English Advanced)?

HSC marks and scaled marks are different marks. HSC marks are the marks released by the Board to students and are the result of the standards-setting exercise. Scaled marks are, however, based on raw HSC marks.

- In 2-unit English all students complete a common paper (Paper 1) which counts for 40% of the total mark. Advanced and Standard students then complete separate papers that count for 60% of the total mark.
- The Board then uses Paper 1 to place the marks of the separate Standard and Advanced papers on the same scale so that a total (raw) examination mark can be calculated for 2-unit English. The marks for Standard and Advanced students are deemed to be on the same scale.

- The Board moderates school assessments using these raw examination marks.
- The raw HSC mark which is used for scaling is then calculated.
- The raw HSC marks for the English (Standard) and English (Advanced) students are combined, and scaled as a single course. A raw HSC mark yields the same scaled mark for Standard and Advanced students.
- The Board aligns the raw examination marks against standards separately for Standard and Advanced students. As a result, Advanced students on a given raw mark receive a higher aligned mark than Standard students on the same raw mark. Consequently an aligned HSC mark corresponds to different scaled marks for Standard and Advanced students. This gives the appearance that Advanced students have been disadvantaged, but this is not true.

If I'm eligible to get bonus points, does my ATAR change?

No. If universities allocate bonus points they are not added to your ATAR. Bonus points are not ATAR points, they are just that – bonus points. Bonus points don't change your ATAR; bonus points change your selection rank for a particular preference or course.

If bonus points don't increase my ATAR, then how do they work?

Universities allocate bonus points for different circumstances. Examples include students with strong performance in HSC subjects, students who live or attend school in an area defined by the university and students who have applied for consideration through Educational Access Schemes.

For most Year 12 applicants, your selection rank for university entrance is your ATAR. However, if universities allocate bonus points to you for a particular preference, then your selection rank for that preference = ATAR+bonus points. As the bonus points schemes for each university, and often for each course at the same university, are different then your selection rank can be different for each course you list in your course preferences.

How can I find out more?

There's a lot more information about the ATAR on UAC's website at www.uac.edu.au/atar/.

How can I contact UAC?

write to:	Universities Admissions Centre Locked Bag 112 SILVERWATER NSW 2128
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